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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 005103

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND GENERAL CASEY CONVENE A SUNNI ARAB
ADVISORY COUNCIL

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

1. (C) SUMMARY: A group of politically connected Sunni Arab figures urged the Ambassador and MNF-I CG Casey to expedite detainee releases and to facilitate stand-up of credible, non-sectarian Iraqi security forces. In a December 13 meeting prior to the national elections, they agreed to meet regularly with us to discuss political and security issues such as detainees, MNF-I raids, the training of Iraqi Security Forces, election fraud, and the formation of the next government. All present agreed to formulate a set of shared principles that would guide the group's work. For the time being, all agreed that the elections were critical and torture investigations needed to be speeded up. General Casey told the group that major pre-election military operations were over and that the leaders must reach out to insurgent groups to make that gesture reciprocal. END SUMMARY.

Establishing the Group

2. (C) The Ambassador and General Casey convened the first meeting of a National Advisory Council of Sunni Arab leaders on December 13 in the Embassy. Khalilzad expressed hope that the group would remain an ongoing source of advice and dialogue as the elections proceed and Iraq's next government is formed. General Casey echoed those goals and assured the group that recent military operations in Anbar province had succeeded in positioning Iraqi forces all along the Syrian border. By the meeting's close, the Ambassador, General and the group had agreed to draft a list of principles to guide the group in future meetings. They also agreed on three key points:

-- (1) Torture is unacceptable, and the investigations into allegations of torture, particularly at Jadriyya Prison, must be sped up.

-- (2) Participation in the elections is critical, and the elections must be credible.

-- (3) Major military operations are over, and the leaders must reach out to insurgent groups to make this gesture reciprocal.

3. (C) General Casey told the group that no major operations were currently planned and urged the leaders to push insurgents to stand down as well. He noted that there are still some 60-70 attacks on MNF-I every day.

Key Issues Raised

4. (C) The group of Sunni Arab leaders raised the following key issues:

-- DETAINEES: TNA Member Adnan al-Janabi urged a review of detainee release procedures. He called for more consideration for special requests, and he warned that arrests often outpaced releases, making even confidence building gestures ineffective. Former Sunni Waqf Director Adnan al-Duleimi repeated that point, complaining that he had submitted hundreds of names with little effect. Iraqi Islamic Party leader Tareq al-Hashemi urged that Sunni imams be released. Sunni Waqf Director Abd al-Ghafour al-Samarai called for MNF-I and the Interior Ministry to publicize the names of detainees to at least ease fears among families with missing relatives. Janabi added, "We come from a culture where incarcerating a person is worse than death. For Bedouins, the worst punishment was to send someone away from the tribe." Hashemi warned that an unjust detainee process was spreading terrorism, not combating it. "Moderate members of the Iraqi Islamic Party are being arrested on false charges and when they come out they're Zargawi!" he exclaimed. Casey said some 6,000 detainees have been released since April. Janabi complained that arrests have equaled detainees released since April, as well.

-- RAIDS: Janabi called for MNF-I to work more closely with Sunni clerics in coordinating raids, particularly on places of worship. Hardan warned the General that 80 percent of raids in Anbar were harassing innocent people. He lamented that his own house had been raided six or seven times. "If

I'm a minister and this happens to me, God help the rest of them," he commented. Casey rebutted this claim and underlined that raids occur only after meticulous checking of information and precise targeting. Hashemi asked the Ambassador to block the Iraqi Security forces from operating after curfew, the time frame when he said the worst abuses take place. Duleimi protested the use of snipers in Ramadi. -- TORTURE INVESTIGATIONS: Janabi complained that the investigation into MOI torture in Jadriyya was moving far too slowly. He also warned that rumors abounded of other secret facilities. Hashemi passed a list of other secret MOI detention facilities. Ambassador emphasized that any instances of torture were unacceptable, and he pledged to push for a speedier investigation. (Comment: The Mission is actively investigating Interior and Defense ministry detention facilities. The Hashemi list was too vague about locations to be useful, and we passed it back to him subsequently for clarification about alleged secret detention facility locations. End Comment.)

-- SECTARIAN RIVALRIES: Several of the leaders warned of the divisions developing in Iraqi society. "When will the massacre of Sunni Arabs stop?" Hashemi exclaimed at one point in the meeting. "There is a program underway to drive us out, rid Iraq of Sunni Arabs, and pass over the nation to Iran." Samarai said, "The Shia say, 'We are fixing a wrong done 1400 years ago. They are on TV saying, 'We have been oppressed for 1400 years.'" He shook his head in amazement and said, "This election will tip the scales. Their talk about Sunnis being a minority will be shown to be false, and the Shia will return to their numbers." Hashemi accused the Ambassador of backing Jalal Talabani for the presidency and settling on Shia candidates for the prime ministership. The Ambassador said that was not true.

-- ISF RECRUITMENT: Hashemi complained that 95 percent of most Iraqi regiments were made up of Shia Arabs. General Casey insisted that claims that the army does not represent the components of Iraqi society are false. Casey said the solution is local Anbar recruitment to join the security forces. As they fill out the forces and those forces grow more capable, the coalition will be able to leave the cities, he predicted. He supported forming a committee to help oversee what needed to be a long term process.

-- ELECTIONS: The leaders voiced concerns about fraud and complaints about seat distribution. Hashemi and Iraqi Islamic Party political bureau member Ala Makki claimed that the population figures used to divide up seats were weighted against the Sunnis. He noted that he had complained to the TNA and IECI, and neither side would take responsibility. He said Ministry of Planning population projections for 2004 were a more reliable basis for seat distribution. He said the current numbers being used would cost Sunni Arabs some 8 seats in the coming parliament. Khalilzad encouraged the IIP to tackle the seat problem through legislation in the parliament geared to fixing the next vote. He added that guards and monitors at polling stations would help combat fraud, and the vote count will be done on site.

15. (C) The meeting, which took place before the December 15 election, was largely a chance for Sunni Arabs simply to vent their fears and frustrations to the highest level of the U.S. Mission. The tone was more urgent than angry, and all of the participants appreciated the gesture. They showed their commitment to begin a long-term dialogue, improve security, and achieve tangible results. As a next step we are meeting at a working level to hammer out a set of agreed-upon principles concerning renunciation of violence, importance of political participation, and protection of human rights. KHALILZAD